

SUBJECT: Relating to college readiness and success

COMMITTEE: Public Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 10 ayes — Aycock, Allen, J. Davis, Deshotel, Farney, Huberty, K. King, Ratliff, Rodriguez, Villarreal

0 nays

1 absent — Dutton

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, April 25 — 30-0, on Local and Uncontested Calendar

WITNESSES: For — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Melody Chatelle, United Ways of Texas; Casey McCreary, Texas Association of School Administrators; Julie Shields, Texas Association of School Boards)

Against — None

On — (*Registered, but did not testify:* David Anderson, Texas Education Agency)

BACKGROUND: STEM refers to studies in the fields of science, technology, engineering, or mathematics. Education Code, sec. 61.0517, defines “applied STEM course” as an applied science, technology, engineering, or mathematics course offered as part of a school district’s career and technology education curriculum and approved by the State Board of Education (SBOE) for purposes of satisfying the mathematics and science curriculum requirements for the recommended high school program.

Education Code, sec. 61.0761, establishes the P-16 College Readiness and Success Strategic Action Plan. The P-16 Council recommends to the commissioner of education and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board a college readiness and success strategic action plan to increase student success and decrease the number of students enrolling in developmental course work in institutions of higher education. The plan includes:

- definitions of the standards and expectations for college readiness;
- a description of the components of a P-16 individualized graduation plan sufficient to prepare students for college success;
- the manner in which the Texas Education Agency (TEA) should provide model curricula; and
- recommendations on teacher certification.

The commissioner of education and the coordinating board adopt the college readiness plan if they determine that it meets the necessary requirements. The SBOE retains ultimate authority over the P-12 curriculum.

Education Code, sec. 61.833, requires a four-year institution of higher education, such as a university, to forward the transcript of a student who transferred from a community college (or other lower-division institution) to the community college to see if the student is eligible for an associate's degree.

A university sends the transcript with the student's permission once the student has earned a cumulative total of 90 credit hours, 30 of which were earned at the community college. If the student is eligible for an associate's degree, the credits are "reverse transferred" from the university to the community college and the associate's degree awarded by the community college.

DIGEST:

SB 1509 would expand the definition of "applied STEM course," allow the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to develop or identify programs that enhance student success, and lower the number of credits needed for a reverse transfer associate's degree from 90 to 66.

Applied STEM courses. SB 1509 would add dual-credit courses — courses offered for both high-school and college credit — to the definition of a course that could qualify as an "applied STEM course." The bill would include college readiness standards to the curriculum requirements satisfied by an applied STEM course.

Identifying programs that enhance student success. SB 1509 would direct the coordinating board to identify higher education bridge programs, professional development programs, and other programs that support the state's "Closing the Gaps" strategy to increase participation and success in higher education. The bill would direct the commissioner of higher

education or the commissioner's designee to determine qualifications and requirements for student participation and institutional or public school eligibility for the "Closing the Gaps" programs.

Lowering the number of credits for a reverse transfer associate's degree. The bill would decrease from 90 to 66 the required cumulative number of credit hours a student must have completed before the university forwarded the student's transcript to the student's community college.

Repealer and effective date. SB 1509 would repeal Education Code, sec. 61.0761(d), which currently requires the commissioner of education and the coordinating board to jointly submit to state leaders prior to each regular session of the Legislature a progress report on the implementation of the P-16 College Readiness and Success Strategic Action Plan.

The bill would take effect on September 1, 2013.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

SB 1509 would make a number of changes to the state's approach to improving college success.

Applied STEM courses. SB 1509 would allow dual-credit programs to count as applied STEM courses. These courses always should have been eligible, and the bill would fix an oversight by including them.

The bill also would allow applied STEM courses to count toward college readiness standards and curriculum requirements. The SBOE has approved college readiness standards as part of the state's public education curriculum (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills) for mathematics and science. Applied STEM courses are a natural fit and would strengthen these existing standards.

Identifying programs that enhance student success. The bill also would allow the coordinating board to identify programs that contribute to college success rather than requiring the board to develop them.

Lowering the number of credits for a reverse transfer associate's degree. SB 1509 would increase the number of associate's degrees awarded in Texas. Because not all transfer students complete a bachelor's degree, it is vital that those who have met the requirements of an associate's degree be awarded that credential to make them more

competitive in the job market.

While current law requires universities to forward a transfer student's transcript to the student's community college once the student has earned 90 credits, this is an unnecessary delay. Most associate's degrees in Texas require 60 credit hours. Lowering the requirement from 90 to 66 would mean the transcript was forwarded shortly after the student likely had earned enough credit to qualify for an associate's degree.

The current requirement of 90 hours is too high. A transfer student who did not reach 90 hours might never request that a transcript be sent to the original community college, not knowing that he or she qualified for an associate's degree.

SB 1509 would not significantly increase the reporting requirements of universities. Current law already requires universities to send a transfer student's transcript to the student's community college when certain conditions are met. SB 1509 only would require universities to forward a student's transcript an earlier stage of a student's academic career. The increase in associate's degrees would benefit individual students and the state's economy enough to outweigh any possible burden.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

The number of credit hours required before a university sends a transfer student's transcript to the student's community college should not be lowered from 90 to 66, as SB 1509 would do, because a student has a better chance of actually having completed an associate's degree with 90 credit hours than with 66 credit hours. To earn an associate's degree, a student must have completed the core requirements of the degree, and 66 hours could include remedial classes or other credits that do not qualify as part of a degree program. This often happens if, for any reason, students do not take their classes in the correct sequence.

SB 1509 would impose another unfunded state mandate upon institutions of higher learning. With the trigger lowered to 66 hours from 90 hours, universities would have to send more transcripts to community colleges. While this might not be a large increase in a university's work load, SB 1509 still would require universities to perform another activity outside of their core function of teaching and research.

OTHER
OPPONENTS

Rather than having a student's transcript sent to a community college sooner, as SB 1509 would do, it would be better to require universities to

SAY: send the transcript more often. This would increase the likelihood that the student's earned associate's degree would be detected and awarded by the community college. Current law does not require the transcript to be sent more than once.